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JESUS PRAYS

by

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DePauw University

Author of

The Religion of Jesus,
Our Recovery of Jesus, Etc.



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To

My Friend and Colleague

EDWIN POST

George Manners Professor of the
Latin Language and Literature
DePauw University

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P R E F A C E

THIS little book is composed of slightly revised extracts from the author's recent books, *The Religion of Jesus* and *Our Recovery of Jesus*. The favor with which these comments on the prayer-experience of Jesus have met, especially among laymen, has led to their publication in separate form.

W. E. B.

Greencastle, Indiana

Good Friday, 1930.

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INTRODUCTION

THE PRAYER-ACT.

PRAYER is the most distinctive feature of that human attitude which we call religion. It is the practise and principle of prayer, the quest of God involved in it, that distinguishes religion from other systems of thought and observed codes of conduct that sometimes, quite erroneously, are looked upon as religion. Without prayer, in one form or another, the great religions would not have arisen nor could they have survived. We shall never be able to estimate the contribution which prayer in all its forms has made to the religious life of mankind.¹

¹The finest of all studies on the history, psychology and essence of prayer is that of Professor Heiler, of the University of Marburg: *Das Gebet. Eine religionsgeschichtliche und religionspsychologische Untersuchung*. See also Professor Heiler's little book, *Die Buddhistische Versenkung*,

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Feuerbach, one of the most radical critics of Christianity, who saw in all religion only a dreary delusion of the human spirit, wrote: "The deepest essence of religion is revealed in its simplest act—prayer."² Professor Deissmann writes: "Religion, wherever it is vital in human life, is primarily prayer."³ From Professor Heiler: "Prayer is the heart and soul of religion. Not in dogmas and institutions, not in rites and ethical ideals, but in prayer we come face to face with the religious life. In its utterance in prayer we apprehend the deepest and most intimate impulses of the pious soul."⁴ The

which closes with a brief comparison: *Buddha, der Meister der Versenkung—Jesus, der Meister des Gebets* (pp. 61-67). An especially fine picture of Jesus' prayer-life is given by Professor Deissmann in his *The Religion of Jesus and the Faith of Paul*. This enlarged English edition had its earlier form in German: *Evangelium und Urchristentum. Beitræge zur Weiterentwicklung der christlichen Religion*. Both had their origin in an article which appeared in the *Christliche Welt* (XIII, 1899, cols. 701ff.), "Der Beter Jesus. Ein vergessenes Kapitel der neutestamentlichen Theologie." On prayer in the Old Testament, see Greiff, *Das Gebet im Alten Testament*; on prayer in primitive Christianity, see von der Goltz, *Das Gebet in der Aeltesten Christenheit*.

²*Das Wesen des Christentums*, VII, p. 184.

³*Evangelium und Urchristentum*, p. 95.

⁴*Das Gebet*, p. 2.

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practise, principles and place of prayer may in all justice be made touchstones for determining upon the essence of any particular religious faith. "The distinctions and differences between particular religions and religious personalities reveal themselves with special sharpness in prayer."⁵

Prayer is the life-breath and pulse of personal piety. No one can state fully what prayer has meant for those who have really practised and experienced it. The great men of prayer speak of it as an irrepressible inner necessity. Luther wrote: "He who does not pray, neither calls upon God in time of need, certainly does not regard Him as God and does not accord Him His divine honor."⁶ Prayer is the source-spring of authority and power in the personal religious life. Professor Streeter quotes Sadhu Sundar Singh: "The man of prayer is the only one whose opinion is worth having in regard to religion."⁷ Again from Pro-

⁵Heiler, *Die Buddhistische Versenkung*, p. 61.

⁶Quoted by Heiler, *Das Gebet*, p. 1.

⁷*The Message of Sadhu Sundar Singh*, by B. H. Streeter, p. 145. Courtesy of The Macmillan Company.

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fessor Heiler: "Prayer is certainly the freest and most personal expression of piety; the original creative power of the outstanding religious genius reveals itself with great clearness exactly in prayer."⁸

A history of prayer would amount to a history of religion, for in the prayers of mankind we have the most reliable reflection of religious experience in all of its stages of development, the lowest as well as the highest. The prayers of men reflect their hopes and fears, their ambitions and aspirations, their moods and tempers, their cherished longings and deepest desires. It is generally true of the psychology of prayer that the *prayer*⁹ brings into his prayers the things that matter most in his life. Thus prayer in all its forms exhibits the scale of values in the life from which it comes.

The values sought in the history of prayer range from the highest to the lowest. Primitive man prayed more frequently, more passionately and more persistently than does

⁸*Das Gebet*, p. 235.

⁹*Prayer* is printed in italics to indicate *the one who prays*.

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cultured man. This seems to be due to the fact that the prayer-process is one of the non-rational elements in religion; it is essentially naïve, and neither in principle nor in practise did it create a problem for the primitive man who practised it. The cultured mind is rationalistic and reflective, and both things tend to compromise the purity and to weaken the power of prayer. The greatest prayers of history, however, have not come from primitive man but from cultured man. In these great prayers the *prayer* does not reason; he does not stop to reflect, but as primitive man he pours forth the deepest distress and desires of his heart in the presence of his Maker.

Primitive man poured out in his prayers every concern, major and minor, of his life. Nothing was too trivial or matter-of-fact to bring into the presence of his god or gods. If a thing concerned him in any way, it also concerned his deity, and he did not hesitate to confront his deity with his desire or need. In a most unhindered and unhampered fashion his praying released his emotions of fear and anxiety, his feeling of awe and

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wonder, expressed his faith and confidence, his sense of need as well as his momentary wish or whim, and often gave vent to his vexation and displeasure with his god or gods. In prayer, at times, he did not even hesitate to threaten and intimidate his gods. Primitive man prayed to his gods for sunshine and rain, clothing and food and shelter, for increase in family and field and flock, for his own personal safety and prosperity. Such were the central concerns of his life, and their abundance or shortage he linked up with his gods and their doings. Consequently his prayers poured forth with all of his native primitive passion.

The prayers of cultured man often manifest a decrease in passion. He excludes the more unworthy emotions that caused primitive man to find fault with his gods. The chief progress in prayer from its lower to its higher forms is to be found in its scale of values. Cultured man disdains to burden his prayers and his God with his every personal whim and notion. His conception of the prayer-process is much higher, and he excludes from it all that is unworthy and

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trivial. Like primitive man, his passion bursts forth in prayer when he is faced with the major issues of life and death, but the minor matters he seeks to face more on his own account because he realizes that they are minor and because he lives consciously on a higher religious plane. Even the material necessities of life fall into the background of his prayers. He must have food, clothing and shelter, but he does not storm high heaven for their possession. He looks upon them as the provisions of a gracious Providence, but still they remain values of a secondary order. Prayer in its highest forms includes these things, but the *prayer* seeks of the Divine rather the light and strength necessary to the securing of the highest values. The cultured man prays for spiritual values: moral content and solidity of character, ethical control of conduct, religious restraint of natural impulses, social good-will and brotherhood, the forgiveness of sins, triumph over evil in every form, and finally for the society of the Divine itself.

Prayer represents both a personal and a social religious value. It is practised both

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by the individual and by the group. But prayer at its best is personal, intensely personal. The group may have its prayers and pray them with genuine passion. But the group can but rarely pour forth its emotions in a single expression; its sense of need is seldom so intense, its concentration is never so spontaneous and involuntary as that of the individual. The religious emotions of the individual find an immediate focus and even before he has time to reflect they have burst forth into their natural expression. This immediacy, so fundamental in the prayer-experience, is never quite accessible to the group. No matter how vital the bond that brings the group together, a focus of feeling must be sought and reflection is required to find its appropriate expression, and this delays the prayer-process. The great prayers of the collect are never really its own, for they were first prayed by some great soul in its quest of God. About the most that the group can attain in prayer-experience is the discovery of the prayer of some great *prayer* for which the group finds verification in its own religious experience.

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Common prayers and praying face the danger that confronts all religious acts that have come to be observed by repetition—that they will become formal and impersonal, leaving the individual participant without a corresponding content of experience.

Prayer may never become an institution and remain true to itself, for at its best prayer is instinctive. It is private and personal to a degree that the common cult can never attain. And the student who would learn to know the heart of prayer will not turn to a prayer-book, but to the prayed prayers of some struggling soul. The twenty-third Psalm will never mean for us what it meant for the one from whose inner experience it sprang, for it comes to us as a composition. At its birth-hour and birth-place it was a communion with the Divine, a bursting-forth of faith and confidence in the God of Israel. The twenty-third Psalm becomes our very own only when we find ourselves in the identical situation of the original *prayer* and can pour into it the whole substance of our religious faith and feeling. "In its original form prayer is a

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spontaneous discharge of emotion, a free and full outpouring of the heart."¹⁰

Prayer may be made in public, it may be whispered in solitude with God alone as witness, it may be an unintelligible cry devoid of coherent expression, or it may be an unutterable longing of the innermost soul, but it is always, if it retains any measure of its native genius, a communion with the Divine. In its form it is spontaneous and extemporaneous, the free and involuntary improvisation of the moment.

¹⁰Heiler, *Das Gebet*, p. 150.

CHAPTER I

THE PRAYER-HERITAGE OF JESUS

JESUS came from a praying people. The practise of passionate prayer runs through the religion of the Old Testament like an unbroken golden strand. It survived all the fates and fortunes of Israel's colorful history, and exactly in times of crisis, even in the midst of catastrophe, we witness an intensification of Israel's prayer-life. In its prayer-experience Israel stands unique in the history of religion. No nation perhaps passed through a more tragic career, and except for the solid substance of its religious life, this people would certainly have lost all confidence and faith in its God. Yet the pious souls of Israel, whether in time of defeat and death or in time of peace and prosperity, turned to their God in reverent petition, protest and praise. The God of Israel was a God who always heard and answered prayer, a religious confidence that

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was built into the very nerve and fiber of its personal and social life and without which such an array of prayer-literature as the Old Testament presents would have been impossible (Psalms 116,1-2):

“I love Jehovah, because he heareth my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call *upon him* as long as I live.”

The great heroes of Israel were all men of prayer—patriarchs, princes, prophets and priests. Prayer reaches back into the earliest traditions of this people. The Old Testament story opens with the first man walking and talking with his Maker. The story itself is naïve and of relatively late origin, but it reflects an ancient conviction of Israel to the effect that man in his ideal state was in constant communion, in immediate and intimate intercourse with God. (Gen. 3.) The first great prayer-scene is Jacob’s night of wrestling with the angel. (Gen. 32,22-32.) This is really a picture from Israel’s prayer-life, a reflection of its persistent pursuit of its God,

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"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me,"

and in it is deposited Israel's sense of triumph in prayer,

"I have seen God face to face."

Moses appears as the great intercessor between God and His people, and his figure towers to its loftiest heights when he seeks out the solitude of the holy mount and prays for his people. (Deut. 9.) In I Samuel 2,1-10 we meet Hannah's prayer of praise. Samuel prayed all night for Saul. (I Sam. 15,11.) David is Israel's prince of prayer, and with his name most of its prayer-literature was linked up. Solomon's prayer has come down to us as a great classic. (I Kings 3,6-9.) Even down to the last literary echoes of Israel's history we have great *prayers*: Manasses, Esther, Daniel, Judith, Tobit and so forth. Throughout its history the great and small of Israel—prince and peasant, man and woman, rich and poor, young and old—turn with equal confidence to God in prayer.

But the high point in Israel's prayer-

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life—in its practise, principles and values prayed for—comes with the great prophets of the sixth and eighth centuries. Almost without exception they are men who are in constant contact with the Divine, and their prayers appear and reappear in their writings. The prayer-life of some of the prophets is more prominent than that of others, a difference due to individual temperament, but the common picture of the great prophet is that of a man praising, petitioning or protesting to his God in behalf of himself or his people. From the first to the last they are men of vital prayer-experience. Of Amos, Hoelscher writes: “It was in the experience of prayer that Amos became a prophet.”¹ Of Jeremiah, the most sensitive of the prophets, Wellhausen says: “Jeremiah is the father of prayer.”² The prayers of the prophets are too numerous to be cited here,³

¹*Die Profeten*, p. 195. See Amos' prayers in 7,2-3; 7,5-6.

²Quoted by Heiler, *Die Buddhistische Versenkung*, p. 64.

³Cf. Hos. 6,1ff.; 10,12; 14,1ff.; Isa. 28,16; 30,15; 38,10-20; 40,26-31; 42,5ff.; 45,6ff.; 48,12; 63,6-64,11; Jer. 10,23ff.; 14,1ff.; 15,11; 15,16; 17,18; 18,20-23; 20,7 11 12; Ezra 9,5-15; Neh. 1,5-11; 9,5ff.; Hab. 1,2-4; 1,12-17; Jon. 2,2-10; Zech. 13,9.

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and their importance is not due to their frequency but to the fineness of their spirit and the richness of their content. The prayer-life of Israel swung upward with the rising tide of the prophetic religion which brought to Israel's religious experience a moral and ethical content unattained by any other ancient people. Personal and private prayer of a high order is the product of prophetic piety, especially of a religious experience like that of Jeremiah. The prophets enriched the content of Israel's prayer-life, ennobled its principle and practise, and directed it toward the highest religious values. Such a development was necessary in view of the very nature of the prophetic type of religious experience; in it there was deeply imbedded a keen sense of social and personal need, a sense which must find an outlet in prayer, in prayer under inner pressure.

But the prayer-life of Israel did not remain on this high level. With the national downfall, all that Israel had left was its religious faith. And this was saved only because it became encased in a system of cult

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and ceremony. The priest supplanted the prophet as the religious authority, and the effect on Israel's prayer-life was only natural. "Law-loving Judaism preferred the formulated prayer of daily duty to the formless prayer of spontaneous expression."⁴ Prayer became a prescribed practise of the faithful. There seems to have been, even at an early date, a system of daily prayer.⁵ Praying became a religious good-work. Not only was praying prescribed, but the *prayer* was provided with prayers. Instead of pouring out his own heartfelt need in his own free fashion, there were prayers prepared for him for almost every occasion and emergency. Prayer became a cult and a ceremony, and the prayers were impersonal, formal, liturgical and ritualistic rather than free spontaneous releases of elemental religious emotions. The *prayer* became a participant in a religious celebration. Every religious festival had its appropriate prayers and psalms, and the pious soul was provided with the famous eighteen-petition prayer for

⁴Heiler, *Das Gebet*, p. 236.

⁵Cf. Psalms 57,17; Dan. 6,10; Acts 3,1.

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rehearsal three times daily and sufficient to cover all the ordinary religious needs.

But no religious system is sufficient to supply the prayer-needs of the individual and, even when the priest and his cult were supreme, the religion of the individual did not die out and become extinct. This we see in the collection of the Psalms where the conventional hymns of the congregation, the prayer-compositions of the temple and its festival cult, stand side by side with the passionate personal prayers of the individual who utters his own special petition, praise or protest. More than half of the Psalms are the individual and personal prayers of the layman.

No finer collection of prayer-literature is to be found than in the Psalms of the Old Testament, and they bear abundant testimony to the richness of Israel's prayer-life.⁶ In them we see Israel praying in public as a people, and we hear the Israelite praying in private for himself and his peo-

⁶For an especially fine study of the Psalms as prayer-life and literature, see Professor Staerk's commentary in *Die Schriften des Alten Testaments*, 3te Abteilung, Band I.

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ple. As Greiff writes of the people of Israel, "The whole of their life is a prayer; everything they do is always with an upward look to God, and they undertake nothing without Him." Every occasion, major or minor, personal or national, began and ended with prayer.

The prayers of the Psalter include everything that the Israelite regarded as desirable and worth while for himself and his people. He prays for personal and social values: prosperity and posterity in family and nation, for immunity in time of epidemic, for food in time of famine, for help against personal and national oppressors, for personal and national power and victory, for signs and wonders to demonstrate the majesty of God to unbelievers, for rain and harvest, for recovery from illness, for protection from evil, for clean hands and pure heart, for forgiveness of personal and national sin, for divine counsel and comfort and guidance, for spiritual and physical welfare of self and others, for deliverance from sins of tongue, pride, passion and inner lust, for the wisdom

Das Gebet im Alten Testament, p. 119.

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and fear and knowledge of God, and finally for the real presence of God with himself and people.

It was a feeling of deep reverence and gratitude that caused the Israelite to lift his face to heaven. In the midst of all the vicissitudes of life, when failure felled him or fortune favored him, the pious soul of Israel poured forth his petitions, praises and protests with all the intensity and passion of elemental emotion. The Israelite felt that his God was with him as he faced all the issues of life. The Psalter is a "wondrous expression of an unbreakable confidence in God."⁸

It was his sense of need that brought the Israelite to his knees: an augmented feeling of dependence, fear, awe, wonder, a deep consciousness of sin, increased need of forgiveness, deplorable inability and weakness in coping with the forces of evil. Psalm 51,9-15 is the great *Miserere* of the Psalter. In his prayers the Israelite expressed his highest hopes and aspirations. He mani-

⁸A. Bertholet, quoted by Greiff, *Das Gebet in Alten Testament*, p. 102.

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fested the greatest confidence in the prayer-process. He felt that it was a source of personal and social power, a positive reinforcement. It resulted for him in inner mobilization, refreshment and peace of soul, a clarification of puzzling situations and perplexing circumstances; in short, the prayer-act brought him all that he understood as religious light and strength. It gave him clearness and certainty concerning the divine will and, above all, the sense of the divine presence.

The failure of the prayer-act did not diminish his praying; on the contrary, he prayed with increased fervor and passion. His reaction to his praying was always a subordination of self, subjection and surrender. He began his prayer with assurance, and it ended with his reassurance. Often a passionate petition is followed by a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. In the religious experience of Israel prayer had the most definite kind of disciplinary and pedagogical function. It had its concrete issues in moral character, ethical conduct, and in the fear and love of God. The greatest prayers of

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the Psalter are those private intimate prayers of Israel's great religious personalities. They mark mile-stones in the path of personal piety's progress to its goal. They exhibit a remarkable maturity of religious experience, a power, a purity and a rich religiousness that spring from a courage that grapples with all the problems that confront the religious consciousness and that forces them out into that awful arena where man stands alone with his Maker.

The Gospel writers themselves, so far as they treat the theme of prayer, are interested primarily in the praying of Jesus and his group. Now and then, however, in a purely incidental manner, they throw fleeting side-lights on the prayer-life of two contemporary Jewish sects, the Pharisees and the followers of John the Baptist, with both of whom Jesus came into contact.

Almost without variation the Gospel picture of the Pharisees is drawn from the single angle which sees them only in the ranks of the opponents and critics of Jesus and his disciples. The very fact that they

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belonged to the critical and unsympathetic witnesses of the teaching and work of Jesus causes the Gospel writers to lose all interest in any worthy or commendable aspects of the Pharisees' prayer-life. Consequently they report only the unfavorable reactions and comments of Jesus on their praying. It is only for a pretense that they make their long prayers. (Mark 12,40.) They make a public parade of their praying in the synagogues and in the corners of the street. (Matt. 6,5.) They are guilty of a distorted devotion to a true religious value. They wish to be seen of men rather than heard of God. And in one of his finest parables Jesus puts on the lips of a Pharisee a prayer which, by its very utterance, defeats itself:

“God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I get.” (Luke 18,11-12.)

Some feel that the Gospel picture of Pharisaic prayer is overdrawn, that Jesus'

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comments are unjust. But in all probability Jesus himself entertained some such estimate of the praying of the Pharisees and of others of the religious sects of his day. The above comments seem to be genuine, to come from Jesus rather than later Christian bitterness. Prophet-like, Jesus singled out the abuses and took commendable and worthy elements for granted. We must remember, too, that these sharp comments of Jesus come fresh from a particular instance of the age-old conflict between the prophet and the representatives of organized religion.

The Gospel picture of John the Baptist and his followers is more friendly. Jesus himself does not comment on the praying of the Baptist and his group. In the few extracts from the Baptist's message that have come down to us there are no words of his on prayer. The Gospel writers tell us a great deal about the Baptist but nothing of his own praying. Luke, however, in two brief notices found only in his Gospel, lets fall our only hints concerning the prayer-life of the Baptist's followers. In 5,33 we read, "The disciples of John fast often and

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make supplications." In 11,1 Jesus' disciples come to him with the request, "Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples." John the Baptist, then, seems not only to have taught the practise of prayer but to have given a special prayer to his followers.

It is against this background, past and present, that the praying and prayers of Jesus are to be understood. Behind him for centuries there reaches a rich heritage of prayer-life and literature. Prayer came to him by social inheritance, but for Jesus it was much more than a practise that came to him from a praying people. It was not social imitation that caused him to pray. Jesus was steeped in the prayer-literature of his people, but he kept up the spirit rather than the letter of Israel's prayer traditions. The conventional, ritualistic and liturgical prayers of the past and present did not satisfy his religious instincts. In that incomparable collection of prayers, the Hebrew Psalter, Jesus remained true to himself: He turned to those intimate per-

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sonal prayers of the pious layman. In his prayer-life and prayer-experience Jesus was not the priest, but the prophet. Like Jeremiah before him, he poured forth his innermost soul to God.

In coming to the prayer-life of Jesus we strike upon the very pulse of his personal piety. In no feature of the Gospel picture is the real religiousness of Jesus clearer than in his teaching on prayer, in his practise of prayer, and in his prayers themselves. We shall approach his prayer-experience from these three angles, all of which are very clear in our best sources, the first three Gospels.

CHAPTER II

JESUS' WORDS ON PRAYER

PRAYER to God and to Christ, through him and in his name, is much more than just a principle and practise of New Testament Christians. *It is a passion.* It appears in practically every document of the New Testament. The great majority of its pages contain prayers, notices of Christians praying, or admonitions to prayer. Yet it is surprising how few of the New Testament writers make any allusion to what must have come down to them as the prayer-life of Jesus.

In Acts, the fifth and last of the New Testament books in story form, one is impressed with the prayer-life of the early Christian community, yet in the whole of this elaborate document there is not more than one clear echo from the prayer-life of Jesus—the dying words of Stephen. The account of Stephen's death is certainly

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modeled after that of Jesus in the Third Gospel. The first Christian martyr dies, as did his Master, with a prayer of forgiveness on his lips,

“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”
(Acts 7,60.)

And, like Jesus, he commends and commits his spirit—but to the Risen Lord, a prayer-object—

“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” (Acts 7,59.)¹

Paul, the earliest and most prolific of the New Testament writers, had a remarkably rich prayer-experience. His letters contain numerous testimonials fresh from his own communion with God and with Christ. Constantly he is admonishing his readers to pray frequently and fervently, assuring them of prayer's noble function and value in the Christian life. Yet not once does Paul

¹The prayers of Jesus, both found only in Luke, are:

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” (23,34.)

“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”
(23,46.)

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point to Jesus' words on prayer, his retreats for prayer or his prayers. Paul's *Abba*-cry in Galatians 4,6 and Romans 8,15 is the only possibility of an echo from the prayer-experience of Jesus. This neglect by the greatest of the apostles is most astounding.

In the New Testament epistles generally we meet with the same neglect of Jesus' prayer-life that appears in the letters of Paul. Often their writers come upon the theme of prayer, but it does not suggest to them the prayers and praying of Jesus. The author of James, for example, is deeply impressed with the teaching of Jesus, yet he cites Elijah as the model for Christians who would prevail in prayer. (5,17-18.)

The one great exception among the writers of New Testament epistles is the author of Hebrews. He is the one of all upon whom the soul-struggles of Jesus left a profound impression. (2,18; 4,15-16.) It is the elemental character of Jesus' praying that has laid a firm hold on this author. He speaks of Jesus as one

“Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with

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strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear, though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered." (5,7-8.)

Otherwise in the New Testament, apart from the Gospels, there is no real recourse to the prayer-life and experience of Jesus.

Even among the Gospel writers themselves there is no uniform interest in Jesus' teaching on prayer, his retreats for prayer and his own personal prayers. In the first three Gospels one is impressed with the richness and resourcefulness of Jesus' prayer-experience, but in the Fourth Gospel one is struck with its utter poverty.

In the first three Gospels prayer is a prominent theme in the teaching of Jesus, but in the Fourth Gospel he has very little to say on prayer as a fundamental practise of piety. About the only occasion on which he touches on this theme is a brief passage in the farewell address. (15,14-17.) But even these words are simply his personal promise to the little band of disciples that they shall be heard if they believe in him and

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pray in his name. Not a sentence on prayer in the Fourth Gospel leaves the impression that it is autobiographical, the fruit of Jesus' own prayer-experience. The Johannine Jesus feels no need of prayer such as we find in the Jesus of the Synoptics. When he prays it is not for himself, but for the belief of others in himself. The answer to his prayer in 12,27-28 is not for his sake but for that of the unbelieving bystanders. (12,30.) He even presents himself as a prayer-object, and personally promises to answer the prayers of his disciples. (14,13-14.)

In the Fourth Gospel there is not a single retreat to solitude for prayer, not one instance of his seeking out the seclusion of the desert to be alone with his God. The author of the Fourth Gospel seems deliberately to neglect this important factor in the religious experience of the Synoptic Jesus. In fact, he seems interested in suppressing anything and everything that would suggest a real religiousness of Jesus. The practise of prayer would imply personal need on his part, but in the faith of the Fourth Evangelist Jesus is above all such need. The

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Johannine Jesus transcends all the situations in which he appears. Not even in the garden or on the cross does he feel the need of prayer. Three of the four Synoptic words of Jesus on the cross are prayers, but not one of the three Johannine words on the cross is a prayer.

In the first three Gospels we find seven great prayers of Jesus, but of this wondrous collection not one reappears in the Fourth Gospel. Of the Gethsemane prayer alone there remains a badly tattered fragment. (12,27-28a; 18,11.) From the lips of Jesus the Fourth Evangelist has taken the most precious prayers that the history of religion knows: "Our Father who art in heaven . . . ," "Not what I will . . . ," "My God, my God . . . ," "Father, forgive" The Fourth Gospel reports only three prayers of Jesus: the remnant of the Gethsemane prayer (12,27-28a; 18,11), the prayer at the grave of Lazarus (11,41-42), and the highpriestly prayer (17,1-26).² The principal point to the Gethsemane

²The only other notice of Jesus' praying in the Fourth Gospel is in 6,11—thanksgiving at the feeding of the five thousand.

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prayer is gone: Jesus' submission to the divine will. The other two prayers have no parallels in the first three Gospels. Even these two are not prayed prayers; they are not the spontaneous outbursts of a soul in petition or praise to God. Both are public rather than private, didactic rather than devotional. The second is literary and liturgical, even ecclesiastical. (17,1-26.) They lack the pressing compactness and spontaneity of the prayers of Jesus in the first three Gospels. They are the free compositions of the Fourth Evangelist, didactic discourses (especially 17,1-26), delivering the fundamentals of the Johannine faith. Both are impossible on the lips of the historical Jesus.

In the Fourth Gospel, then, we find a virtual elimination of the prayer-experience of Jesus. This results in a grave impoverishment of the personality of the historical Jesus at the hands of the Fourth Evangelist. On the basis of its neglect of his prayer-life alone, the Fourth Gospel takes itself out of the body of reliable biographical matter on the Jesus of history.

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The first important step in the study of the prayer-experience of Jesus is the full realization of the fact that he felt no problem in prayer and praying. There is not the faintest shadow of doubt in his mind concerning the prayer-process. He offers no prayer apologetics, no defense or justification for its practise. The theoretical difficulties and the practical doubts of the modern mind connected with the practise and value of prayer never occurred to Jesus. Like all the great religious geniuses, the very passion of his personal piety threw him out beyond these.

That prayer may be only an autosuggestive process by which the individual prods himself along the prosaic path of piety, a release of pent-up feeling resulting in the relief of inner tension, a devotional delusion with an imaginary rather than a real influence—such possibilities which harass the reflective type of mind seem never to have disturbed him. Jesus approaches prayer with a childlike unaffectedness and simplicity. He has no psychology, no philosophy, no theology of prayer such as the

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modern mind seems to require.³ Christian theology, philosophy and psychology have wrestled with the problem of prayer, with the possibility of man communicating with his Maker, but Jesus comes to us with a plain, prosaic picture:

“Two men went up into the temple to pray . . . ” (Luke 18,9-13)

and before he has finished we know that men may or may not commune with the Holy One. The really important thing in all such pictures is not what they teach others, but what they reveal of Jesus' own prayer-experience, of which they are crystal-clear reflections. In his experience prayer is an instinctive process, the one great recourse of the religious consciousness. He is driven to prayer out of a deep sense of native and

³For characteristic academic approaches to prayer, see: Coe, *The Psychology of Religion*, chapter XVIII; Pratt, *The Religious Consciousness*, chapter XV; Selbie, *The Psychology of Religion*, chapter XI; Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, chapter XXIX; Streeter, *Concerning Prayer—Its Nature, Its Difficulties, and Its Values*; Puglisi, *Prayer*.

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natural need, and all his teaching on prayer and his praying express just such need.

In his teaching Jesus attempts no definition of prayer. His approach to prayer is just as untheoretical as is his approach to all the elements that go to make up religious experience. His approach is naïve and unreflective, and for this reason prayer appears in the religious life of Jesus in its primitive purity and power. The modern mind with all its reflections and reservations concerning prayer is seldom, if ever, able really to pray. Reflection chills and inhibits the prayer-process. Only as its sense of need completely overwhelms all its rational reflection can the modern mind really pray again.

Jesus presented prayer as a principal religious value. His words on prayer are simple and plain enough, and need no special exposition. All prayer is to be directed to God. Into the prayer-act men may pour the whole of their feeling and faith; in it they may express their deepest desires and most vital needs. He gave his disciples no prayer-precepts, no fixed prayer-text, no prayer-cult or prayer-rites, no stipulations as to

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time and posture, in short, no prayer-system. Jesus prayed as none before or after him, and he taught his disciples extensively on the practise and principles of prayer. But we never see him observing specially set hours of worship; he does not withdraw for calendared seasons of prayer. The praying of Jesus and his group is instinctive rather than institutional. It stands as a high mark in the religious genius of Jesus that he left man alone with his Maker. He gave no formal instruction with regard to prayer; rather he sought to impart inspiration to true prayer. From his many words on prayer we single out those which are most characteristic and distinctive of his own prayer-experience.

Jesus teaches that prayer is private and purely personal, an inner precinct in which man stands alone with his Maker where no curious eye may look on. Prayer as a religious good-work, prayer on public parade, he rejects as a distorted devotion to a true religious value:

“And when ye pray, ye shall not be as

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the hypocrites: for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have received their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee.” (Matt. 6,5-6.)

Jesus teaches that true prayer is brief and to the point. There is no reason for a recital of needs, no reason for a rehearsal of all the details of the situation in which the *prayer* finds himself:

“And in praying use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.” (Matt. 6,7-8.)

Over against this calm assurance of answer to prayer are two perturbing parables

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of Jesus teaching prayer as a persistent pursuit, introducing that permanent paradox which is puzzling but real because it springs fresh and strong from actual prayer-experience:

“Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine is come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him; and he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee? I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will arise and give him as many as he needeth.” (Luke 11,5-8.)

“There was in a city a judge, who feared not God, and regarded not man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came oft unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor re-

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gard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest she wear me out by her continual coming." (Luke 18,2-5.)

Concerning the attitude of the *prayer* Jesus gives us two priceless prayer-pictures in what for me personally is the greatest of all his parables. Prayer must be devoid of all personal pride; it defeats itself if it becomes a recital of virtues. In the presence of God man can be conscious of only one thing, his sinfulness; he can pray first only for mercy and forgiveness for himself:

"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I get. But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God, be thou merciful to me a

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sinner. I say unto you, This man went down to his house justified rather than the other." (Luke 18,10-14a.)

Such are the characteristic and most distinctive words of Jesus on prayer. But all of them are more than mere teaching. All are autobiographical and confessional, springing fresh and strong from his own prayer-life. In all of these words Jesus is introducing us to the secrets of his own prayer-experience. "In the prayer-ideal which the great *prayers* have projected they have given to us a picture of their own praying . . . In his brief and scattered words on true and false praying Jesus has characterized himself."⁴ When he hurls his sharp criticisms at the hypocrites who pray in public and at the Gentiles who think they will be heard for their much speaking, he gives us an insight into his own manner of praying: apart with God as the only witness, compact and to the point. His recommendation for retreat to the inner chamber is direct to us from his own personal prac-

⁴Heiler, *Das Gebet*, p. 34.

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tise. It reflects the reticence that surrounds the whole of his own prayer-life; it is a word that was born at his own soul-shrine. It is the privacy which Jesus preserved for himself. To expose the prayer-act to a curious public is to destroy its purity and power. Secrecy and seclusion afford a compact concentration of the whole personality in the prayer-act.

When Jesus says, "Your Father knoweth," he speaks straight from his own inner conviction and confidence won on his knees. When he says that the asker receiveth, that the seeker findeth, that to the one who knocks it shall be opened, he is simply expressing his own personal faith in the prayer-process. When he says that the father will not give his son a stone for bread, a serpent for a fish, he is openly confessing his deep personal faith in the Father who can not but answer the prayers of His children. (Matt. 7,7-10.) When he gives us the picture of the friend who storms his neighbor's door at midnight, or of the widow who presses her case before the unjust judge, he discloses to us that relentless quest

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and pursuit in which he himself was engaged on his way to clearness and certainty.

This puzzling paradox in Jesus' words on prayer—on the one hand, quiet converse; on the other, stormy supplication—is the reflection of the paradox that existed in his own prayer-experience. Sometimes the pulse of Jesus' prayer-life exhibits a boisterous beat; again its action is slow, undisturbed, composed and confident. There is an attitude of complete confidence running through the whole of his teaching on prayer, also through his prayers.

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matt. 7,11.)

But when he is confronted with a pressing personal problem, we see him storming the heart of the Father for His mind, for his own personal assurance. Jesus' words on prayer, then, are the fine and full fruit of his own prayer-experience. What he has to say

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about prayer reveals what its practise has meant for him—an asking and a receiving, a seeking and a finding, a knocking at and an opening of closed doors.

Jesus' teaching on prayer is not impersonal, but intensely personal. It is not formal, yet it does contain a reflective element. His teaching on prayer is not the finest flower of his prayer-life. This we shall find in his own prayed prayers. His estimate of the place and value of prayer in the religious life is to be sought beyond his teaching on this subject—in his retreats to solitude, in his own personal petitions, praises and protests. It is only as we press back beyond teaching to practise and beyond his practise of prayer to his actual prayers that we realize fully what prayer meant for Jesus. Here we shall meet an intensification of feeling that, because of the very nature of the case, could not find its way into his teaching on prayer.⁵

⁵For other words of Jesus on prayer, *see* Matt. 5,44; Luke 6,28; Matt. 21,22; Mark 11,24; Mark 9,29; 13,33; Luke 21,36; Matt. 26,41; Mark 14,38; Luke 22,40-46. The familiar passage in Matthew 18,19-20 is an extract from early Christian prayer-experience.

CHAPTER III

JESUS' RETREATS FOR PRAYER

THE Gospel notices to the effect that Jesus prayed or that he retreated for prayer are relatively numerous. They are sporadic and appear with an irregularity which shows that they are not a planned part of the Gospel writers' program. In some sections of the Gospel story these notices are few and far apart; in other sections they become frequent and pile up. This very fact gives the historical student a large measure of confidence in the Gospel picture of Jesus' practise of prayer: His retreats for prayer increase when portentous events and experiences are heaviest upon him. The first three Gospels report nine notices of

Jesus' Retreats for				
	Prayer	Matthew	Mark	Luke
(1)	At the baptism			3,21
(2)	Apart from Simon's house		1,35-38	

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	Jesus' Retreats for Prayer	Matthew	Mark	Luke
(3)	After the cleansing of the leper			5,16
(4)	Before the choosing of the twelve .....	.....	.....	6,12
(5)	After feeding the five thousand	14,23	6,46	.....
(6)	At Cæsarea Philippi ..	.....	.....	9,18
(7)	At the transfiguration	.....	.....	9,28-29
(8)	At the giving of the <i>Lord's Prayer</i> .....	.....	.....	11,1
(9)	In Gethsemane	26,36-44	14,32-42	22,40-46

Besides these retreats for prayer, there are other notices that Jesus prayed as he blessed the bread and the fish at the feeding of the five thousand¹ and the four thousand,² also at the last supper³ in connection with the offering of the bread and the wine. Luke 24,30 and 35 would lead us to suppose that Jesus had a peculiar way of blessing bread which made him known to the Emmaus disciples. These notices have to do with prayers of thanksgiving and with the consecration of food. In Matthew 19,13 Jesus appears almost as a popular holy man whose benediction and blessing is sought by all.

¹Matt. 14,19b; Mark 6,41; Luke 9,16.

²Matt. 15,36; Mark 8,6b.

³Matt. 26,26; Mark 14,22; Luke 22,17 19-20.

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Mark's notice in 7,34—"And looking up to heaven, he sighed"—may be a prayer (*Gebetsseufzer*).⁴

In the nine retreats for prayer listed above it is interesting to note that the first seven are Galilean retreats. Matthew has only one Galilean retreat, and Mark has two. The notices that Jesus prayed, or retreated for prayer, are most numerous in Luke who gives special attention to the devotional life of Jesus and has him engaging in prayer at critical junctures throughout his public career. (3,21;6,12;9,18 28-29.) All three report that greatest of all his retreats, in Gethsemane.

It is indeed surprising that Luke preserves so many notices of retreat for prayer and precisely at those critical junctures when personal pressure was heaviest upon the soul of Jesus. Some of these notices are perhaps editorial, settings supplied independently by Luke's own hand. (9,18 28-29; 11,1.) But this literary possibility does

⁴There are other notices of Jesus' retreating to solitude in which prayer is not mentioned: Mark 1,45; 6,30-31; Luke 4,42-43.

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not in the least prejudice the reliability of the tradition to the effect that Jesus in hours of stress and strain, when confronted with specially pressing problems, sought out solitude and seclusion, there to be alone with his God, to seek His will and to strive to perform it. If we may be sure of anything in the Gospels, we may be sure that prayer was a religious resort and recourse of Jesus. If Luke does supply some of the situations, it is only further evidence of the fact that he was deeply impressed by what had come down to him as the distinctly devotional life of Jesus. Further, in Luke these notices appear at those psychological moments when we should naturally expect them to appear.

At the Baptism

The *first* notice of Jesus' praying is found in Luke's account of the baptism. Matthew (3,13-17) and Mark (1,9-11) have no notice of the prayer in connection with this incident. Luke's text reads:

"Now it came to pass, when all the people were baptized, that, Jesus also hav-

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ing been baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form, as a dove, upon him, and a voice came out of heaven, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." (3,21-22.)

Luke's notice of prayer here is only natural. Jesus is taking a religious step, undergoing a religious rite which meant infinitely more to him than the Gospel writers cause to appear. Just all that was in the mind of Jesus on this occasion we are not able to say; just all that John's baptism meant for him we do not know. But it is certainly a religious act on the part of Jesus which he performs in all spiritual sincerity, and any one who has any insight at all into his religious life can not imagine him in any other attitude at the Jordan than that of prayer. Luke does not report Jesus' prayer on this occasion, and we are no wiser than Luke.⁵

⁵The retreat to the wilderness which follows at once upon the baptism was probably a period of intensive prayer, although none of the Gospel writers gives a notice to this effect.

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Apart from Simon's House

The *second* notice of Jesus' praying is found only in Mark. (1,35-38.) Matthew nowhere reports this retreat, and Luke, to our surprise, reports this retreat from Simon's house but gives no notice of prayer. (4,42-43.) Mark's text reads:

"And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose up and went out, and departed into a desert place, and there prayed. And Simon and they that were with him followed after him; and they found him, and say unto him, All are seeking thee. And he saith unto them, Let us go elsewhere into the next towns that I may preach there also; for to this end came I forth."

With the exception of the Gethsemane struggle, this is the most detailed and intelligible of all the retreats reported. It comes at the close of Jesus' first day in public, and we have an unusually full account of the events and experiences that led up to it. (Mark 1,21-34.) His first day

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has been a day of cures, resulting in a tremendous popularity which is disappointing to him personally. His ability to cure strikes him with surprise, and this, with his popularity, throws his mind into a state of serious solicitude concerning the essence of his mission—cause or cures. From Mark's account we might think that this personal problem pressed upon Jesus' mind throughout the night, for "in the morning, a great while before day," he retreats from Simon's house to a desert place, there to pray. Jesus' prayer on this occasion is not preserved to us, but the result of the retreat is quite clear. When Simon and his companions find him, he is already clear and certain as to the course he will pursue: He will go to the next towns and preach rather than return to Capernaum and cure. This retreat for prayer results for Jesus in clearness and certainty concerning his mission: His great task is to preach the kingdom of God. This retreat is one of the most dramatic situations in the whole of the life of Jesus known to us, and the drama reaches back to the very soul of Jesus himself.

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After the Cleansing of the Leper

The *third* retreat for prayer is reported by Luke only and is connected with the cleansing of the leper. (5,12-14.) Matthew (8,1-4) and Mark (1,40-45) have no retreat for prayer in connection with this cure. Mark has Jesus retreat to "desert places," but has no notice of prayer. Luke's text reads:

"But he withdrew himself in the deserts, and prayed." (5,16.)

Luke supplies no special reason for this retreat unless it is the thronging of the multitudes. (5,15.) Luke 5,16 may be only the delayed notice which Mark reported earlier. (1,35-38.)

Before Choosing the Twelve

The *fourth* retreat for prayer is also peculiar to Luke and falls on the night preceding the choice of the twelve. Matthew neglects the choice of the twelve as a definite act of Jesus and reports only the catalogue of their names in connection with their mission. (10,1-4.) Mark reports the choice of

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the twelve, but gives no notice of prayer in connection with this choice. (3,13-19a.) Luke's text reads:

“And it came to pass in these days, that he went out into the mountain to pray; and he continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called his disciples; and he chose from them twelve.” (6,12-13a.)

In Luke, then, the choice of the twelve appears as a distinctly religious act of Jesus, and from Luke we should suppose that not only the act of choosing twelve permanent companions but the selection of the personnel of the group was the result of a night of prayer. The choice of the twelve was a very important decision of Jesus, and we can not imagine his failing to seek the divine guidance.

After Feeding the Five Thousand

The *fifth* retreat for prayer is passed over by Luke. It is Matthew's only Galilean retreat (14,23) and the second of Mark, whose text reads:

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“And straightway he constrained his disciples to enter into the boat, and to go before *him* unto the other side to Bethsaida, while he himself sendeth the multitude away. And after he had taken leave of them, he departed into the mountain to pray.” (Mark 6,45-46.)

Matthew and Mark supply no special motive for this retreat. It follows at once upon the feeding of the five thousand and provides the setting necessary for the walking on the water—Jesus alone on the land and the disciples together in a boat contending with a heavy sea.

At Cæsarea Philippi

The *sixth* retreat is peculiar to Luke and is reported in connection with Peter's confession at Cæsarea Philippi. Matthew (16,13-20) and Mark (8,27-30) have no notice of prayer on this occasion. The text of Luke reads:

“And it came to pass, as he was praying apart, the disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying . . . ” (9,18a.)

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This is the high point in the Galilean life of Jesus, and Luke reports this notice of prayer at a good psychological moment, although he gives no specific motive for this particular retreat.

At the Transfiguration

The *seventh* retreat for prayer is also peculiar to Luke, in connection with the transfiguration. Matthew (17,1-8) and Mark (9,2-8) have no notice of prayer in their accounts of the incident. The text of Luke reads:

“And it came to pass about eight days after these sayings, that he took with him Peter and John and James, and went up into the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment *became* white *and* dazzling.” (9,28-29.)

This is another of the high moments in the experience of the disciples, and a notice of Jesus in prayer increases the effect; at least,

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this appears as the point of view of Luke. Any one who surveys the stress that must have been on the soul of Jesus during the last of the Galilean days, when the thought of his fate seems to have struck him, would be surprised to find no retreats for prayer. In this notice of prayer and in the preceding, Luke's insight into the religious life of Jesus is accurate and true to fact.

At the Giving of the Lord's Prayer

The *eighth* retreat for prayer is also peculiar to Luke. It is a part of his long and eventful journey to Jerusalem. (9,51-19, 28.) Luke's text reads:

“And it came to pass, as he was praying in a certain place, that when he had ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples.” (11,1.)

This notice is probably editorial, a fitting setting in which Jesus gives the *Lord's Prayer* to the disciples. (11,2-4.) Never-

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theless, Luke in this appropriate setting shows his skill as an editor as well as his genius for sensing one of the great secrets of power in Jesus' exclusively religious personality. However, it may be historical. It does have about it a native naturalness—Jesus' own praying suggests to the disciples the request for a prayer for themselves. The allusion to the practise of prayer by John and his disciples certainly conveys reliable historical information. (Luke 5,33.)

In Gethsemane

The *ninth* is the most familiar of all of Jesus' retreats for prayer, the Gethsemane retreat, reported in detail by all of the first three Gospel writers.⁶ It is the pressure of impending events that brings Jesus to his knees on this occasion. The hour has come; he must face his tragic fate. In Gethsemane Jesus is seeking final assurance concerning the divine will and a moral mobilization of personal powers to meet the most terrible issue of his life. The text of Mark reads in part:

⁶Matt. 26,36-44; Mark 14,32-42; Luke 22,40-46.

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“And they come unto a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith unto his disciples, Sit ye here, while I pray. And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly amazed, and sore troubled. And he saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death: abide ye here, and watch. And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass away from him.”
(Mark 14,32-35.)

This is the only retreat of the nine in which Jesus' prayer is reported. (Mark 14,36.) Matthew and Mark have Jesus retreat from the three disciples three different times, and each time engage in prayer; Luke, however, has only one retreat for prayer in Gethsemane and that directly from the twelve. The results of this retreat are clear enough: Jesus is certain that he must die, and he faces his fate with a courage that is born of a deep religious conviction won on his knees.

Such are the Gospel materials on Jesus' retreats for prayer. In the concrete they do

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not tell us a great deal. In only one of the nine is a prayer reported, in Gethsemane. Usually we have simply the uncommunicative notice that Jesus prayed. The immediate experiences and the impending events that drove him apart for prayer are seldom given. However, it seems that crises in character and conduct, important junctures and turning points in his fates and fortunes, brought Jesus to his knees. In the second retreat (Mark 1,35-38) it is clear enough that the experiences of this Sabbath (1,21-34) bring him apart for prayer early the following morning. The Gethsemane retreat is occasioned by the pressure of impending events. Otherwise, his retreats for prayer come at important junctures in his public life—at the baptism, the choosing of the twelve, at Cæsarea Philippi and at the transfiguration. “For Luke the decisions and choices of Jesus at great moments and junctures in his public career are the result of prayer and petition.”⁷ Sometimes these retreats precede, again they follow, and still

⁷Bundy, *The Psychic Health of Jesus*, p. 190. Courtesy of The Macmillan Company.

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again fall upon critical moments in his experience. The decisions and choices to which these retreats for prayer bring him, the results in his subsequent conduct are not always clear. But in spite of this unclearness in detail, the general fact remains that Jesus retreated for prayer and did pray.

As we noted earlier, there is no regularity in these retreats. They are in no sense a part of a prayer-system. For Jesus prayer was not a traditional religious institution to be engaged in and observed at certain set hours, but the spontaneous impromptu practise of an intense personal piety. Prayer in the practise of Jesus seems to have been the exception rather than the rule, dictated by consciousness of need rather than by imitation of a traditional custom of his people. Some of his retreats seem to have been occasioned by a pressing popularity and the thronging of the multitudes, as well as by the inner need he felt for communion with God. His word to the twelve upon their return from their mission (Mark 6, 31a),

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“Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile,”

is probably a reflection of the need for retirement and rest which he himself felt at times. His word in Gethsemane (Mark 14,38b),

“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,”

is probably the expression of his own need of prayer.

Retreat, retirement and rest are necessary for any man who is always at his best and who is working under high pressure in the realm of the spirit. Jesus felt a deep native need of prayer. Than this there is not a finer expression of the real religiousness of his personality. With all of his natural and native resourcefulness in the realm of religion, Jesus nowhere manifests a sense of self-sufficiency that enabled him to dispense with that primary religious practise—prayer to God. In hours of direst distress he takes his flight to solitude and there seeks a refuge in prayer. All that passed through the soul of Jesus on these occasions we shall never

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know. But that he did pray and continue to pray, that he died in prayer, is all that we are in need of knowing.

The religious experience of our great Christian contemporary, Sadhu Sundar Singh, throws an important light on these retreats of Jesus. Mrs. Parker writes of the Sadhu:

“In South India in 1918 nobody seemed to realize that he was ever exhausted or needed rest, and the long unbroken toil in an atmosphere as foreign as the languages of the people, wore down his spirit. He longed not only for the rest of body but for those periods of quiet meditation and prayer which are the very breath of his existence and source of his power. . . . He loves the open air by night and the open spaces by day, where without any eye to watch he can be alone with his Lord. In such an atmosphere he lives and gathers to himself those reserves of strength and peace which characterize him.”⁸

⁸*Sadhu Sundar Singh*, p. 163, 165f. Courtesy of Fleming H. Revell Company.

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Apart from such a personal parallel, it is sufficiently clear in the Gospel picture that Jesus' retreats for prayer were creative moments in his religious experience and, we may add, in the religious experience of all humankind.

Jesus' retreats for prayer seem for the most part to have been at night. In Mark 1,35 he rises "a great while before day"; according to Luke 6,12 he spent the whole night in prayer to God before choosing the twelve; according to Luke 9,28 and 37 Jesus is all night on the mountain with the three disciples; Gethsemane is a nocturnal retreat. This habit of retreat accords with his instruction on the proper place for prayer as apart and in private. (Matt. 6,6.) "For him praying was a holy thing, so holy that the world might not witness, so serious that too-much-speaking is of the evil one."⁹ "Out of a sense of shyness genuine personal praying conceals itself from profane eyes and ears. . . . The personal prayer-life of the great religious geniuses has its scene in

⁹Deissmann, *Evangelium und Urchristentum*, p. 103.

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solitude and seclusion."¹⁰ In Jesus' retreats to solitude we witness a survival of the spirit of Elijah who sought Jehovah in the desolation of the desert, in the loneliness of Mount Horeb. For the really great religious personality, silence has always been a sacrament; Jesus seems to have loved it as such. He knew the value of solitude and seclusion.

In these periods of prayer engaged in by Jesus there is nothing to suggest the typical temper of the mystic. There are no indications of mystical mannerisms and methods, no seeking for a severing of self, no attempt at the dissolution of the ego, no effort to effect a mystical merging with the object of prayer. In fact, Jesus' retreats seem to have been the very opposite—an intensification of self-consciousness that sought a moral harmony with the divine will. No ecstatic elements, no visionary visitations seem to have invaded these retreats. Luke alone (22,43) has an angel appear to strengthen him in Gethsemane, but this is a later legendary addition not found in Mat-

¹⁰Heiler, *Das Gebet*, p. 26.

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thew and Mark, or in the best manuscripts of Luke.

These retreats seem to have resulted for Jesus in a rallying of personal resources and to have been a source of strong self-possession. They seem to have been times of complete detachment, of compact concentration upon certain central issues, resulting in a state of mind and soul that was undivided and undistracted. Few men in history have attained unto this pinnacle of prayer-experience. Still fewer are the instances in which others have beheld them at this high point, but in these rare instances the experience for the witness has left an indelible impression. Of George Fox, William Penn wrote: "The most awful, living, reverent frame I ever beheld or felt, I must say was his in prayer."¹¹

The great men with great calls and commissions who have made permanent contributions to our human progress upward have passed through times—hours, days, months, even years—when their deepest con-

¹¹Penney, *The Journal of George Fox*, p. xix. Courtesy of E. P. Dutton & Company.

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victions were submitted to the most terrible and trying tests. Often even the validity of their cause and the genuineness of their personal consecration to it were at stake. These tremendous conflicts they have been forced to face and fight out alone, and in many cases, before God. At such times such men know themselves to be immediately in the presence of their Maker, and they pour out the naked substance of their souls. It is in the solitude of such prayer that the world's great religions have been born.

It was in the desolation of the Galilean deserts, in the heavy solitude and seclusion of its nights that Jesus struck deep into the richest source-springs of personal religious experience that our human history knows. Solitude, seclusion and silence filled with his supplications were the things that made Jesus the One he was and always will be. "To go up into the mountain and to come back as an ambassador to the world, has ever been the method of humanity's best friends."¹²

¹²Evelyn Underhill, quoted by Heiler, *Der Katholizismus*, p. 513.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRAYERS OF JESUS

WE NOW turn to the prayers of Jesus, for in them we feel that we come closest to his very soul. Only a few of his prayers have come down to us, a total of seven in the first three Gospels. That we have so few of his prayers is, of course, due to the very nature of his practise of prayer. In protected privacy, in solitude and seclusion, he prayed to his God. In the language of Plotinus, Jesus' retreats are a *φυγή μόνου πρὸς μόνον*—(the flight of the lonely one to the Only One). We may be grateful that even seven have come down to us. In the first three Gospels we have the following

Reported Prayers of				
	Jesus	Matthew	Mark	Luke
(1)	"Our Father, who art"	6,9-13	.....	11,1-4
(2)	"I thank thee, O Father"	11,25-26		10,21
(3)	"Simon, . . . I made"			22,31-32
(4)	"Abba, Father, all things"	26,39-42	14,36	22,42

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Reported Prayers of Jesus		Matthew	Mark	Luke
(5)	"Father, forgive them"			23,34
(6)	"My God, my God, why"	27,46	15,34	
(7)	"Father, into thy hands"	.....	.....	23,46

Mark reports only two prayers of Jesus, in Gethsemane and on the cross, both in the last hours of his life when stress and strain were heaviest upon his soul. Matthew reports both of Mark's prayers and adds two, the prayer of praise (11,25-26) and the *Lord's Prayer* (6,9-13), both of which were without doubt Galilean prayers. Luke again shows the greatest interest in the devotional life of Jesus by reporting six prayers, all of those reported by Matthew and Mark except the cry on the cross, and by adding an allusion to a prayer for Simon (22,31-32) and two prayers on the cross (23,34 46). Five of the seven prayers fall within the last twenty-four hours of Jesus' life, and three of them were uttered from the cross.

In the personal prayers of Jesus we come upon some of the most genuine words of his that have been preserved to us. These tense, terse utterances did not lend themselves so readily to the Christianization process as did

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his general religious message. Further, some of them are so firmly imbedded in certain concrete situations that they could not be easily extracted. To be sure, we do not possess every prayer of Jesus, nor every word just as he prayed it. Matthew's form of the *Lord's Prayer*, so easily repeated, in all probability owes its present smoothness to frequent use in the early Christian circles from which it came. Jesus' prayer of praise, as we shall see, has acquired a later Christian supplement. But judged in the light of all that we know of him, the seven personal prayers of Jesus that have survived bear the distinctive stamp of his thought and style, and in their essential substance they appear as wholly true expressions of his own religious feeling and faith.

The reported prayers of Jesus are his very own, yet one is at once impressed with their genuine Jewishness. Two of the seven are extracts from the prayer-literature of his people. Judged in the light of the sources, objects and issues of the religious experience from which they come, there is nothing in them to sever the organic bond that holds them firmly to that great and living body of

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Israel's religious faith. Further, the genuine Jewishness of Jesus' personal prayers would only increase our confidence in their essential reliability.

The Lord's Prayer

The *Lord's Prayer* is one of those setting-less words of Jesus that has come down to us with no definite indication as to when, where or why Jesus spoke it. Matthew reports it in his Sermon on the Mount in connection with a general discussion of prayer. (6,5-8.) But it is quite inconceivable that Jesus should have uttered this most intimate of all his words upon the very first occasion of his appearance in public as Matthew represents. (5-7.) It certainly belongs to the later life of Jesus. The very character and content of the prayer demand an intimate and trusted audience which Jesus did not have at the time of the delivery of the Sermon on the Mount, when as yet, in Matthew, he has about him only four recently called fishermen. According to Luke, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem when he gives his disciples this famous prayer (11,2-4) in response to their request,

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“Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples.” (11,1.)

Whether Luke gives the historical occasion for the *Lord's Prayer* we shall never be able to say. As we noted in the preceding chapter, Luke's occasion may be editorial, but it possesses a naturalness that is a tribute to Luke's editorial skill and psychological insight. We may be certain that the *Lord's Prayer* is a genuine word of Jesus, but of the occasion out of which it arose, when and where it was spoken, we are not certain.

The *Lord's Prayer* is reported only by Matthew and Luke. It is very surprising that such a significant word escaped Mark. But even this gem from the religious experience of Jesus has not come down to us in its purity. Matthew and Luke report it in two quite different forms. Matthew's form includes seven petitions,¹ that of Luke

¹The Jewishness of the *Lord's Prayer* in Matthew has been pointed out by Rabbi Gottlieb Klein, of Stockholm. He writes: "According to Matthew, the *Lord's Prayer* consists of seven petitions; according to Jewish precept, a prayer should have just seven. Further, the proper prayer should be made up of three parts. It should begin with a hymn praising God, *Schebach*. Thereupon the personal portion of the prayer should follow, the *Tefilla*, and the prayer

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only five. Scholars generally at present, in contrast with the older consensus of opinion, regard Luke's form as the more original. Matthew's form, so familiar to us, has about it a literary smoothness, an almost liturgical character due probably to frequent repetition. Luke's form is more abrupt and broken, and has the marks that suggest the impromptu speech of Jesus.

Matthew 6,9-13

Our Father who art in
heaven.

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done,

as in heaven, so on earth.

Give us this day our daily
bread.

And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven
our debtors.

And bring us not into temp-
tation,

but deliver us from the
evil one.²

Luke 11,2-4

Father,

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Give us day by day our daily
bread.

And forgive us our sins;
for we ourselves also for-
give every one that is in-
debted to us.

And bring us not into temp-
tation.

should close with a doxology, *Hodaja*. The *Lord's Prayer* follows this order and arrangement. Finally, a prayer, even that of the individual, should be in the plural. Such is the case in the *Lord's Prayer*." (*Ist Jesus eine historische Persoenlichkeit?* p. 35.)

²Some manuscripts of Matthew conclude the *Lord's Prayer* with the familiar doxology. The majority however

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In our discussion at this point we are interested in the *Lord's Prayer* only as it relates itself to Jesus' prayer-experience as a whole. Orthodox theology in the past has cut off this prayer from the experience of Jesus, claiming that it is not a prayer that Jesus could or would pray for himself and that it fits only the situation of the disciples for whose benefit alone he gave it. This objection is based solely on the petition for forgiveness of sins which orthodox theology feels would compromise its doctrine of the sinlessness of Jesus.

He who raises theoretical objections to the propriety of Jesus praying entirely as he prays in the *Lord's Prayer*, who sees in it only a prayer for his followers and not for

omit this, and textual criticism has come to reject it as a later liturgical addition. Historical research, however, could state with confidence that the Jewish prayers of the period often closed with a doxology (*Hodaja*). The student of the psychology of religion could add that there is nothing in the expression—*For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Amen*—to take it from the lips of Jesus. Judged in the light of the religious objects addressed and the religious attitudes expressed, this doxology fits into the personal piety of Jesus as organically as any other part of the prayer.

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himself, has his eyes blinded for ever by a theoretical theology that hides from him the very soul of Jesus' personal piety—in fact, he has lost the real Jesus of history who feared, loved and prayed to God. There can be no real religious objection to Jesus having prayed the *Lord's Prayer* as his own. The only possible objection is a purely theoretical sinlessness of Jesus rather than an actual sinlessness of religious accomplishment, which no historical student denies. It is universally true of the religious consciousness that the subject with the clearest conscience is the first to pray for forgiveness. His very humanity, his native sense of distance between himself as man and his Maker, excludes the possibility of the omission of such a petition. The deeply religious consciousness that remains healthy may not entertain the thought of its own sinlessness without thereby compromising its purity of heart.

The *Lord's Prayer* differs from the other prayers of Jesus in that it is consciously didactic; it is given for instruction and contains a reflective element. However, it still

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remains a devotional, a prayed prayer of Jesus, and it sprang from the very depths of his religious experience. It is the richest single word of his that has come down to us. No other one passage gives us so much of Jesus himself. Into no other utterance did Jesus pour more of his own life, thought, feeling and faith. It contains the supreme religious values which he himself sought, and as such it is the direct issue of his own prayer-experience. It is an invaluable testimony of what Jesus himself sought in prayer. In it Jesus gives us his best, and it stands as the richest and ripest fruit of his own prayer-life. Rabbi Gottlieb Klein writes:

“It is the most personal reminiscence from Jesus that we possess. All the hopes and desires of his God-filled heart are here concentrated in a single utterance.”³

Jesus' Prayer of Praise

Jesus' *second* prayer is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. It is distinctly personal

³*Ist Jesus eine historische Persoenlichkeit?* p. 34.

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and devotional. Just when and where Jesus uttered this prayer is also uncertain. Matthew (11,25-26) reports it in a more or less meaningless connection where there are no immediate antecedents that would lead up to such an enthusiastic outburst. He introduces it in a matter-of-fact way, "And at that season Jesus answered and said." Luke, however, seems to sense the exalted state of soul out of which it sprang and to feel the sweep and swing of emotion that carries it along. (10,21.) He introduces it with the more noteworthy notice, "In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and said." However, Luke supplies a general setting out of which the prayer came. It follows at once upon the mission of the seventy and their return (10,1-20), and Luke seems to intend to say that the enthusiastic report of the returning disciples occasioned this prayer of praise. But there are technical literary difficulties in the way here, and the historical student finds in this prayer another of the many genuine, but settingless words of Jesus. However, the strong emotional element with which the prayer is charged

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shows that it comes from some high moment in the religious experience of Jesus, even though we are not in a position to locate and identify it. The text of Matthew and Luke reads verbatim:

“I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father; for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight.”

The following passage in both Matthew (11,27) and Luke (10,22) is commonly regarded as the organic continuation of this prayer. The text of Matthew reads:

“All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal *him*.”

There is an intended literary continuity that brings these two passages together. Other-

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wise, however, they constitute in no sense an actual unity of utterance from a living personality. The first passage is in the first person of direct address, the true form for purely personal prayer, but the second passage drifts off into the third person of impersonal discourse and thus gradually departs from the intimate intercourse which personal prayer demands. In the first passage Jesus is a true religious subject pouring out a prayer of praise to the Father, but in the second passage he becomes a religious object who is discoursed about. The first passage is a terse utterance, tense with deep and strong emotion, but from the second passage the flood of feeling is gone and we have only an abstract Christological statement that betrays nothing of the warmth which we sense at once in the first. The first passage is a true prayer in form, thought and feeling; the second, however, is of Christian origin, a deposit of early Christian conviction and thought. The first passage is a personal religious confession from Jesus' own experience; the second is a confession of early Christian feeling and faith concerning

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the relation of the Son to the Father and of the Father to the Son.

Professor Deissmann speaks of this prayer as Jesus' "most compact confession of his experience of God."⁴ It is a spontaneous outburst of Jesus' religious feeling, expressing his exalted faith in the Father. Here we meet the naked substance of his confidence and trust in God, a praising of His will and way.

When we survey the nature of Jesus' experience in public, we may say that this prayer of praise and thanksgiving springs perhaps from the joy of conquered disappointment, conquered because such was the will and way of the Father. Jesus' disappointment would come from the facts of his general experience in public; his joy would come from his faith that had surmounted all fact. At any rate, the prayer seems to express a conviction born of sudden insight, and it is to be appreciated as such rather than analyzed. Of this prayer Johannes Weiss wrote: "Before us we have a hymn of exalted inspiration that owes its existence to

⁴*Evangelium und Urchristentum*, p. 103.

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an hour of deepest spiritual seizure and that must be measured with other standards than are applied to the more didactic words of Jesus: It must be sensed and shared.”⁵

Jesus' Prayer for Simon

The *third* prayer of Jesus we have only in substance. It is found in Luke alone (22,31-32) in the form of a word addressed to Simon when Jesus is at the table with the twelve. Luke's text reads:

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat; but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not.”

When and where Jesus prayed for Simon we do not know, but the character of his allusion as well as historical probability would put it in only the most immediate past, perhaps on that very night, even at the table. There is not much that we can say about this prayer, but we know Simon, and

⁵*Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, I, p. 309.

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it helps us to a fuller knowledge of Jesus. This brief word throws a whole flood of light on the intimate bond that drew and held Jesus to his chosen companions. His attachment to them is most deep and devoted; their personal fates and fortunes become themes of his petitions to God; he knows their weaknesses and prays for the firmness of their faith in time of test and trial.

Jesus' Prayer of Submission

The *fourth* prayer of Jesus is the famous Gethsemane prayer. It is the first of the only two prayers reported by Mark, and the only prayer reported by all of the first three Gospel writers. According to Matthew and Mark, Jesus prays this prayer three times; in Luke, however, only once.⁶ The occasion of this prayer is perfectly clear. Jesus here is struggling with the immediate prospect of his fate to which he refers as a cup, and he has hardly finished praying before the authorities are upon him and place him under arrest. In this prayer Jesus petitions that

⁶Cf. Matt. 26,39 42 44; Mark 14,36 39 41; Luke 22,42.

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the cup may pass from him, but above this petition he prays for the divine will for himself even to the drinking of the cup. The text of this prayer varies slightly in the first three Gospels, but not enough to affect either its thought or its point. The text of Mark reads:

“Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; remove this cup from me: howbeit not what I will, but what thou wilt.”

No prayer of Jesus reaches deeper or reveals more clearly the very soul of his personal piety. In it there is no doctrine, no dogma, no theology, no soteriology. To seek to fit such a prayer into a system or scheme of salvation is to tear out its heart. It must be approached from the standpoint of the psychology of a living personality, the very core of whose being was exclusively religious. In this prayer there is no fanaticism seeking a tragic fate; there is also no fatalism that goes to its end in a feelingless fashion. Jesus' Gethsemane prayer is the

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spontaneous outburst of a torn human heart that can reconcile itself to its fate only because such appears as the divine will. This conviction becomes a religious certainty which issues in an heroic submission. Jesus' submission in Gethsemane is his supreme religious act and, we might add, the most exalted altitude ever attained by a human religious subject. Professor Heiler speaks of this prayer of Jesus as "the highest and purest prayer in the history of religion," "the sublime summit in the history of prayer."⁸ Of it Professor Hoeffding wrote: It is "the most profound religious word that was ever uttered."⁹

Jesus' Prayer of Forgiveness

The *fifth* prayer of Jesus is peculiar to Luke also. (23,34.) It reads:

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

⁷*Das Gebet*, p. 93.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁹Quoted by Heiler, *Ibid.*, p. 239.

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Textual criticism has had many a skirmish over this word of Jesus because it is not found in some of the best manuscripts of the Third Gospel. But textual criticism has its very serious limitations when it comes to determining the genuineness of Biblical passages. There is nothing in the form or thought of this word that would take it from Jesus. It is as true as steel to the best of his spirit and is in every sense a true prayer of petition. At a very early date this prayer was fixed upon the mind of the early Christian community as one of his dying words. In one of the most primitive pieces of tradition in the book of Acts Stephen is pictured as dying in imitation of his Lord with his prayer on his lips,

“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”
(7,60.)

Forgiveness is the very heart of Jesus' teaching on human relationships; he presents it as indispensable to men who must live together and die at the hands of one another. His words on love and forgiveness to enemies

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are the product of such prayer as appears here. That Luke is here modeling Jesus' conduct on the cross to correspond to certain of his teachings is a most puerile type of criticism. It is in this word on the cross that the purity and power of Jesus' prayer-experience have their issue in a corresponding purity and power of character and conduct. In such a prayer we meet the absolute climax of ethical conception: a content of character, a code and control of conduct, that enable a man to die at the hands of his enemies and yet forgive them fully in the presence of God with his latest breath.

Jesus' Prayer of Protest

The *sixth* prayer of Jesus is found only in Matthew and Mark, and is verbatim from Psalms 22,1. This prayer and the following are involuntary invasions from the prayer-life and literature of Jesus' people. It is not a conscious citation; Jesus does not reflect and select, but into this ancient cry he pours the whole of his distress. On the cross Psalms 22,1 becomes his very own. Mark's text (15,34) reads,

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“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

This prayer is a cry to God *de profundis*. In direst distress, in the midst of terrible tension of soul, in the throes of physical agony, Jesus prays. It is not a cry of despair and defeat. It is a prayer of protest. In Jesus we do not see an utterly dumb devotion, but a reverent reaction to the requirements of the divine will. In this prayer we meet a “self-assertion with a consciousness of complete dependence.”¹⁰ The horrors of the hour do not rob Jesus of his faith in God. He does not desert God, but asks why God has deserted him. His own personal faith is firm to the last, and this cry on the cross springs from a tremendous strength of soul. Behind such a protest there lies the solid substance of a soul that knows the sustaining power of prayer. “If religious faith were dependent upon experience, the many unanswered prayers would have led long ago to the end of all religious

¹⁰Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, p. 438. Courtesy of Yale University Press.

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life. . . . The strongly religious personality will find in unanswered prayer, in experiences that call the certainty of his faith in question, only an augmented impulse to hold all the more firmly to the reality of the Eternal.”¹¹

Through such a cry as comes from the cross faith doubles its power, and such a prayer restores calm and composure. This cry stands as the final affirmation of Jesus’ faith in God. “Exactly this last cry is a final confession of Jesus to the omnipotent will of God.”¹² “It is indeed wonderful how he, in the throes of suffering, feeling that he is deserted of the Divine, at the very last takes his flight to none other than the heart of his God.”¹³ In Mark Jesus dies as he has lived, in the throes of struggle with his God. There is no force that can tear him from his faith, from his quest of the Divine. He refuses the numbing drink (Mark 15,23), preferring to fight the last great fight of his faith in clear consciousness, in full possession

¹¹Mundle, *Die religioesen Erlebnisse*, pp. 48, 49.

¹²Wernle, *Jesus*, p. 55.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 63.

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of all his faculties. In such an hour, with such a prayer on his lips, Jesus simply staggers us with the virtue and volume of his faith in God.

Jesus' Prayer of Commitment

The *seventh* and *last* prayer of Jesus is found only in Luke. In Matthew (27,50) and Mark (15,37) we have only an inarticulate cry. The text of Mark reads,

“And Jesus uttered a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.

But in Luke (23,46) this last cry becomes articulate and expresses itself, with the exception of the first word, in the language of Psalms 31,5a. Luke's text reads,

“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”

In Luke Jesus dies as he has lived, dispensing forgiveness to his enemies, promising Paradise to a fellow-victim, and at the

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last calmly committing himself to the One whom he has always trusted. The contrast between the pictures of the dying Jesus in Mark and Luke is at once clear.¹⁴ These last prayers are paradoxical—one, a distressed protest (Mark 15,34); the other, a calm commitment (Luke 23,46). Both are probably true to historical fact. The history of religious experience exhibits just such paradoxes in which a stunning sense of divine desertion is reversed into a state of complete confidence and trust, and the subject calmly commits himself to the One who a moment before, it seemed, was gone for ever out of his life. Mark's cry of distress had its origin in a firm faith that pours forth its need to God in its darkest hour. The release of soul in such a cry restores a calm and a composure that allow it to withdraw from the scene of history, committing itself with confidence to the Father-God of its faith.

¹⁴See Bundy, *The Passion Week*, p. 194ff.

CHAPTER V

FEATURES OF JESUS' PRAYING

IN A survey of Jesus' prayers the *first* thing that impresses the student is their utter, unadorned simplicity. In this respect they stand in sharp contrast with the typical prayers of mankind. "The most profound disposition of vital religion is to clothe its objects of faith with the highest predicates of honor."¹ It is to God alone that Jesus prays, in no name, and for no sake. All of those admonitions to pray "in his name" or "for his sake" are of later Christian origin. They do not go back to Jesus' own prayer-life, for such would contradict his constant religious attitude and would result in a complete collapse of his religious consciousness. In his prayers Jesus follows no pious program, no mechanical method, no tedious

¹Mundle, *Das religiöese Leben des Apostels Paulus*, p. 54.

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technique, no fixed formulas, no heaping-high of the deity's titles and predicates. Five of the seven prayers begin with the simple and intimate address, *Father*. We have only the substance of his prayer for Simon (Luke 22,31-32), and we do not know the address of the prayer itself. However, such an intimate supplication could hardly have had any other address. His cry on the cross is verbatim from Psalms 22,1; it begins with the address, *My God, my God!* In such a cry Jesus' experience of God as high and holy, as inscrutable and unfathomable, predominates over his experience of God as Father. In it we see a distressed human being laying bare the substance of his soul—mere man in the terrible presence of his mighty Maker. In his prayer of commitment (Luke 23,46) he supplies to the Old Testament text (Psalms 31,5a) the affectionate appellation, *Father*. There is a specially intimate feature preserved in Mark's text of the Gethsemane prayer (14,36); its address is in Jesus' native provincial dialect, *Abba, my Father*. The most elaborate address is in his prayer of praise, *O Father, Lord of heaven and*

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earth, where a fuller form is only natural. Jesus' prayers are all models for his own word, "In praying use not vain repetitions." (Matt. 6,7.) The simplicity of his prayers is only a natural counterpart to the simplicity of the whole of his religious faith. He does not throw himself in the dust after the manner of his own East, but in the prayer-act he lifts his voice and his soul in simple yet complete confidence. On his knees he feels himself, as always, a child in the presence of his loving Father. It is on this quiet but sublime level that the prayers of Jesus move, always a reverent and confident converse, whether in praise, petition or protest. "In his praying the urphenomenon of prayer, the filial relationship to the Father-God, bursts forth in all its primitive purity and power."²

The *second* thing that impresses the student of Jesus' prayers is their striking brevity. The longest is the *Lord's Prayer*, a half-dozen simple sentences. The prayer of eighteen petitions repeated thrice daily

²Heiler, *Das Gebet*, p. 239.

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by the pious Jew of Jesus' day was ten times as long as the longest of his prayers. With the exception of the *Lord's Prayer*, all others are sentence prayers. Within a single simple sentence he pressed the substance of his supplications. Each of his prayers is compact and to the point, terse utterances with not a word to spare. The very brevity of his prayers is the chief guarantee of their genuineness. This remarkable brevity is the product of something deeper, the fine fruit of his general conception of the whole of religious experience, according to which every excess, every too-much, compromises its sincerity and purity. These pointed prayers are the perfect pattern of his own word to the effect that men are not heard for "their much speaking." (Matt. 6,7.) The prayers of Jesus may be characterized, as William Penn characterized the prayers of George Fox, "by the fewness and fulness of his words."³ In this respect Jesus is true to prayer in its best form. Long prayer loses its free and fresh

³Penney, *The Journal of George Fox*, p. xix.

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flow, its spontaneity, because it demands too much reflection and thought. Even when the period of prayer lengthens in the experience of Jesus, the prayer itself remains brief, as in Gethsemane where he repeats three times the same brief petition as the only adequate expression for the hurt of his soul.

A *third* thing that impresses the student of Jesus' prayers is their elemental character. Without exception they strike down into the very rudiments of religion; in them we see the first principles of piety. The whole ebb and flow of the emotional life finds expression in the prayers of Jesus. They reflect all the varying moods of the religious consciousness in its quest of God. All of those types of prayer most characteristic of genuine personal piety fall from his lips—prayers of praise, petition and protest. In moments of sublime exultation and complete confidence, in times of deepest need, in hours of greatest humiliation and direst distress, Jesus praises, petitions and protests to his God. The pendulum swings from one emotional extreme to the other. The two extreme poles of his prayer-experience are to

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be found in his prayer of praise—highest joy—and in his prayer of protest—deepest distress of soul and body. It is this strong emotional element that accounts for the utter simplicity and brevity of his prayers. They are terse because they are tense; his words are few because they are full. His prayers are spontaneous outbursts, intense outpourings of his innermost soul. Each is a release of an inner tension. They spring vitally and organically from a subjective state which, in turn, finds free expression. Jesus, as is natural to the strongly religious consciousness, prayed under personal pressure, and his prayers are charged with emotions of high intensity—joy, native human need and distress. They are primitive in that they are born of the need of the moment, out of a fulness of heart, unrestrained by any degree of rational reflection. In the study of such praying as that of Jesus, theology can not help us. The introduction of a dogma will only obscure our vision. Here we have to do with the solid substance of a sublime soul that launches out into the deep and stakes its all in the quest of God.

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A *fourth* thing that impresses the student of Jesus' prayers is the fact that they are all prayed prayers. His praying was not from habit. He prays out of deep inner impulse. In his hours of need he does not require to be taught how or what to pray. His words betray no reflection, no conscious effort at composition; they are involuntary, unpremeditated utterances of a soul in search of satisfaction for its deepest desires. Jesus' prayers are never professional; they are the prayers of the pious layman—always personal, never impersonal; always informal, never formal. They are abrupt and broken with no attempt at rhetorical finish or stylistic smoothness. This is due to the fact that Jesus' prayers are always private and personal; they are never public prayers, even though witnesses are present. Public prayer by its very nature and the demands placed upon it can never be pure. The *prayer* must think of what he is saying because others are listening. This destroys the spontaneity of the prayer-act at its best. Jesus was forced to pray in public, on the cross, but his prayers are not public, for he is alone with his

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God. In the prayer-act his attention is undivided; the concentration of his consciousness is complete, undisturbed. Witnesses may be present, yet he has but one Auditor. We have no instances of prosaic prayers from Jesus, prayers that were prayed in response to the general conviction that prayer is a religious duty, a practise that should be observed faithfully. The prayers of Jesus that have come down to us arise out of some unusual situation, and they usually reflect the special situation in which he found himself and which determined their content. For this reason they are always prayed prayers.

A *fifth* thing that impresses the student of Jesus' prayers is the complete lack of detail. In none of his prayers does Jesus catalogue his needs; he does not rehearse the situation in which he finds himself; he does not elaborate upon all that is involved for himself. He includes in his prayers no promises, no pledges; there is no bargaining with the deity for a favorable hearing and answering such as prayer on a lower level almost always exhibits. In many of the Psalms the

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petitioner goes into great detail, acquainting the deity with all the items as though such were necessary in the prayer-process. The twenty-second Psalm is a good example of such minute delineation. In his darkest hour Jesus quotes the first sentence of this Psalm, but his confidence in the Father dispenses with all need of elaboration. In Gethsemane he does not say that death is just ahead of him, that his enemies are upon him, that one of his trusted few has betrayed him into their hands, that another is about to deny him, and that all are on the point of deserting him. In such a situation a single simple statement suffices to express his need, and it says all that prayer can or needs to say.

“Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.” (Matt. 6,8.)

Such is the clear crystallization of this phase of Jesus' prayer-experience. And all this rests upon something deeper, his unreserved faith in God. It is this that gives the

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prayers of Jesus their solid substance. His disinclination to dwell on detail is the most profound confession of his personal faith in the divine omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence.

A *sixth* thing that impresses the student of Jesus' prayers is the richness of their content, the high order of values sought in prayer. It is in prayer, as we saw, that the religious subject expresses the sentiments that are strongest, the desires that are deepest, the values that he holds highest and seeks to acquire. In the experience of primitive man the bare necessities of physical existence and survival were of great importance and consequently they occupy the foreground in his prayer-outlook. The exigencies of existence loom up large on the horizon of Old Testament prayers. Jesus' prayers are primitive in the elemental strength of emotion from which they spring and which carries them along. But in the scale of values sought in prayer he is heaven-high above primitive man. Over against many Old Testament prayers those of Jesus manifest a narrowing of the horizon of

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things prayed for. His objects of desire in prayer are the noblest; he seeks the highest values of human conception. He is really radical in his exclusion of thoughts and things from the prayer-process. His selection of goods constitutes one of his chief contributions to the history and practise of prayer. The *Lord's Prayer* is positively unique in the choice of things prayed for. The needs of human existence find expression, "Give us this day our daily bread," for Jesus regards all the concerns of human life, outer and inner, as under the divine providence and direction. But these things fall into the background, or at best they win only a secondary recognition. Jesus prays for the great spiritual values. In his prayers the pressure of outer circumstance, no matter how strong and severe, recedes in favor of an inner pressure of soul which occupies the whole foreground. More intense than the physical pain of crucifixion is the feeling of being forsaken of God.

A *seventh* thing that impresses the student of Jesus' prayers is the sublimity of their purpose. The goal toward which he

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strives is the highest which the history of prayer and its practise presents: In prayer he seeks the divine will into which he would fit himself. The divine will was not always clear for Jesus. He must search to learn it and struggle to perform it. With all of his natural religious genius, Jesus nevertheless belongs to that plodding prosaic type of piety that must battle every step of the way, and prayer is the path which he pursues. In prayer he seeks the harmonization of self, of the whole of his life, with the plan and purpose of God.⁴ For Jesus, religion in its highest attainment is perfect cooperation of the human with the Divine, of man with his Maker. This attainment of religious experience involves one of the principal paradoxes of personal piety: exaltation through submission and self-surrender. Professor Coe states this paradox in its psychological phases: "The prayer-life may be said to be . . . the organization into the self of

⁴Sadhu Sundar Singh writes: "We cannot *alter* the will of God, but the man of prayer can discover the will of God with regard to himself." *At the Master's Feet*, p. 42. Courtesy of Fleming H. Revell Company.

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the very things that threaten to disorganize it.”⁵ In Jesus' own word it is put:

“Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” (Luke 18,14b.)

This aspect of Jesus' prayer-life, in fact, this supreme goal of the whole of his religious experience, reaches its climax in the Gethsemane submission. Through self-surrender he lifts himself to the exalted plane of the divine will. This goal he regards as the highest open to attainment for the religious subject. He himself attempts and attains it. His goal is not a mystical union with the Divine, but a moral harmony of life with the divine will. Here the prayer-practise and experience attains its height, and here again we strike upon one of Jesus' greatest contributions to the religious enterprise of mankind. “Prayer that climaxes in complete self-surrender is the creation of Jesus.”⁶

⁵*The Psychology of Religion*, p. 316. Courtesy of the University of Chicago Press.

⁶Heller, *Das Gebet*, p. 385.

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In an earlier connection we noted that prayer was in no sense a psychological problem for Jesus. There is not a hint in the Gospels to the effect that he in any wise questioned the prayer-process and its power to produce, or that prayer was in any way problematic for him. The only difficulties with which he deals are of a practical and personal nature, and they concern the *prayer* rather than the prayer-process as such. Any real skepticism regarding prayer—that it is only a monologue of the *prayer* with himself—seems never to have crossed his mind. The prayer-experience of a critical temperament like Alfred Loisy has no parallel in that of Jesus. “For a long time I have not found it possible to pray to God as one beseeches an individual from whom some favor is anticipated. My prayers consist of retiring into the depths of my own consciousness and there gathering my best impulses together to determine what for me is right and lawful.”⁷ The very volume of Jesus’ experience of God as living, loving Father

⁷*My Duel with the Vatican*, p. 275. Courtesy of E. P. Dutton & Company.

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threw him out beyond such rational reflection.

The great *prayers* of history are unanimous in the conviction that prayer is a producing process, and many of them, like St. Teresa, have left warm testimonials of their prayer-experience. Some of them are really remarkable in their psychological insight and critical care in self-analysis. The scientific psychologist who bases his findings on concrete data fresh from the prayer-life of great and small souls must reckon with prayer as a primary power in the religious life at its best. The following statement of Professor Coe is careful and true to the facts:

“It is a way of getting one’s self together, of mobilizing and concentrating one’s dispersed capacities, of begetting the confidence that tends toward victory over difficulties. It produces in a distracted mind the repose that is power. It freshens a mind deadened by routine. It reveals new truth, because the mind is made more elastic and more capable of

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sustained attention. Thus does it remove mountains in the individual, and through him in the world beyond.”⁸

A highly conscientious man of prayer like Sadhu Sundar Singh writes: “The man who prays is himself changed.”⁹

Prayer is a producing process only when it has its roots struck deep in the basal needs keenly felt by the strongly religious consciousness. The *prayer* must find in prayer a personal recourse and resort. It is the practise of the pressed soul. In its best form, then, the results of prayer for the *prayer* are: a discharge of soul, a release of inner tension, the quieting of turbulent emotions, the restoration of inner repose, a fresh sense of unity of self, a reinforcement of personal resources, a strength of will supplanting its former weakness, a virtue as well as a volume of volition, an ability to choose rightly where the ways were once hopelessly crossed, a full development of de-

⁸*The Psychology of Religion*, p. 315.

⁹*Reality and Religion*, p. 6. Courtesy of The Macmillan Company.

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cision, a deepening of inner determination, a coming of certainty to displace confusion, a dawning of clearness, a full illumination, an intensification of impulse, and finally an enveloping inspiration that carries the *prayer* through to triumph.

Jesus has left us no first-hand testimonials of his prayer-experience such as Paul supplies in II Corinthians 12,8-9a:

“Concerning this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for *my* power is made perfect in weakness.”

However, it is quite clear that prayer was a religious recourse and resort of Jesus and that he prayed in response to elemental needs. On one occasion the need of prayer escapes his lips, in Gethsemane,

“My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death: abide ye here, and watch.”
(Mark 14,34.)

Professor Wernle writes: “Jesus was the most powerful *prayer* of history because he

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did not rely on his own power.”¹⁰ He manifested no sense of self-sufficiency; he felt the need of powerful supplementation, and he experienced prayer as a producing process.

Just what and all that prayer meant for Jesus we shall never know. The results of his prayers for himself are not so clearly indicated as we might wish and we must draw our conclusions from scattered straws that point, however, quite unmistakably in one direction. His prayer-experience seems to have brought him all that the great *prayers* understand as religious light and strength. Our glimpses into his prayer-life on one or two occasions show us quite clearly what an important place prayer occupied in his religious experience. The first retreat, in Mark (1,35-38), seems to have resulted in clearness and certainty concerning the essence of his mission. His prayer of praise is a discharge of soul. (Luke 10,21.) His Gethsemane prayer strips the last shred of uncertainty from his mind, and it results in an assembly of volitional powers which bring

¹⁰*Jesus*, p. 57.

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him through the harassing scenes before the Jewish and Roman authorities with a calm and courage that are more than heroic. His cry of distress (Mark 15,34) is a release of inner tension which reverses into a composure and confidence of soul (Luke 23,46).

On the whole, we may say that prayer for Jesus meant an expression of need, a release of soul, a relief of inner pressure, conquest over severe subjective struggle, an elevation and enrichment of mind, a reinforcement and refreshment of spirit, a clarifying of vision, a freshened functioning of faith, a whetting of will, discovery and illumination, restoration of confidence and courage, increased consecration and devotion, adjustment and orientation, a mobilization of personal powers to perform, in short, the energy and power by which to live and work. Even with an increase of clearness and certainty and of personal power to perform, we do not see a diminishing but an intensification of Jesus' prayer-life. His life ends with an almost awful climax—the cry to God *de profundis*.

In Jesus' practise of prayer we get an in-

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sight into the nature and sources of his personal power. His praying brought to him clearness and certainty concerning the divine will for himself; in his retreats he came to important decisions and determined upon the course and code of his conduct. In prayer to God he found that marvelous source of strength that enabled him to perform the divine will even to the cup that was his to drink. Not in visions and voices, but in prayer and communion with God—purely religious sources of light and strength—Jesus learned the divine will and found the personal power to perform it.

In the history of prayer Jesus marks much more than an advance or development. Jesus was the perfect *prayer*. His prayer-experience is an enrichment and enhancement of all that humanity may expect and hope from prayer, of all that man understands as his relation to his Maker. In short, he brought the prayer-act to its perfection.

In his practise of prayer and in his prayers we have preserved to us the deepest

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grounds of Jesus' religious nature. On the basis of his praying alone we may answer the question, Who was Jesus? The very virtue and volume of his prayer-life settles the issue for ever. In such a state of the facts theology can not help us, for we are not dealing with dull and dreary lifelessness but with a living personality whose whole existence centered exclusively upon God. The historical Jesus was a religious subject, an experient of religion. In his very humanness the religious experience of mankind attains its finest form.

THE END

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